

Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge & Management Area

HUNT PLAN

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I. INTRODUCTION

This Hunting Plan formulates the general concept for hunting opportunities on acquired lands as identified in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge and Management Area (Refuge) dated September 2, 2008.

The Refuge encompasses 22, 472 acres in Gibson and Pike counties in southwestern Indiana (see Figure 1). Lands purchased as conservation easements or in fee title are administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and become units of the Refuge under the authority of the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources..." [16 U.S.C. 742f(a)(4)] "...for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude..." [16 U.S.C. 742f(b)(1).]

The Refuge was established in 1994. It was created under authority of the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act in part to protect one of two remaining intact floodplain forest systems within Indiana. The authorized boundary, which delineates where the Service can acquire property from willing sellers, encompasses 22,472 acres of wetlands, floodplain forest, grasslands, shrublands, and upland forest along 20 miles of the Patoka River corridor (see Figure 1). Management objectives are identical for the National Wildlife Refuge, authorized at 7,005.5 acres, and the Management Area, authorized for the remaining 15,466.5 acres. The separate designations avoid legal conflicts with the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977. It has no implications for the management of these areas.

The staff of Patoka River NWR & MA administers three units in addition to the main body of the Refuge. The Cane Ridge Wildlife Management Area (488 acres, fee title, closed to all public access except non-consumptive uses in designated areas), White River Bottoms Unit (219 acres, fee title), and Columbia Mine (1,043 acres, conservation easement) are all considered part of the National Wildlife Refuge.

The Refuge provides hunting opportunities for migratory birds, game birds, small game, furbearers, and big game.

This Hunt Plan will describe, in detail, the current and future hunting opportunities, how hunting will be conducted, and conflict resolution with other management objectives. The Hunt Plan will be a step-down plan of the overall Visitor's Services Plan which will be completed in 2015.

Hunting was identified in the 2008 CCP as being a priority public use that would be authorized on most units of the Refuge. The Service has determined (i.e., Compatibility Determination included with the 2008 CCP) that these uses are compatible with the purpose of the Refuge and the mission statement of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

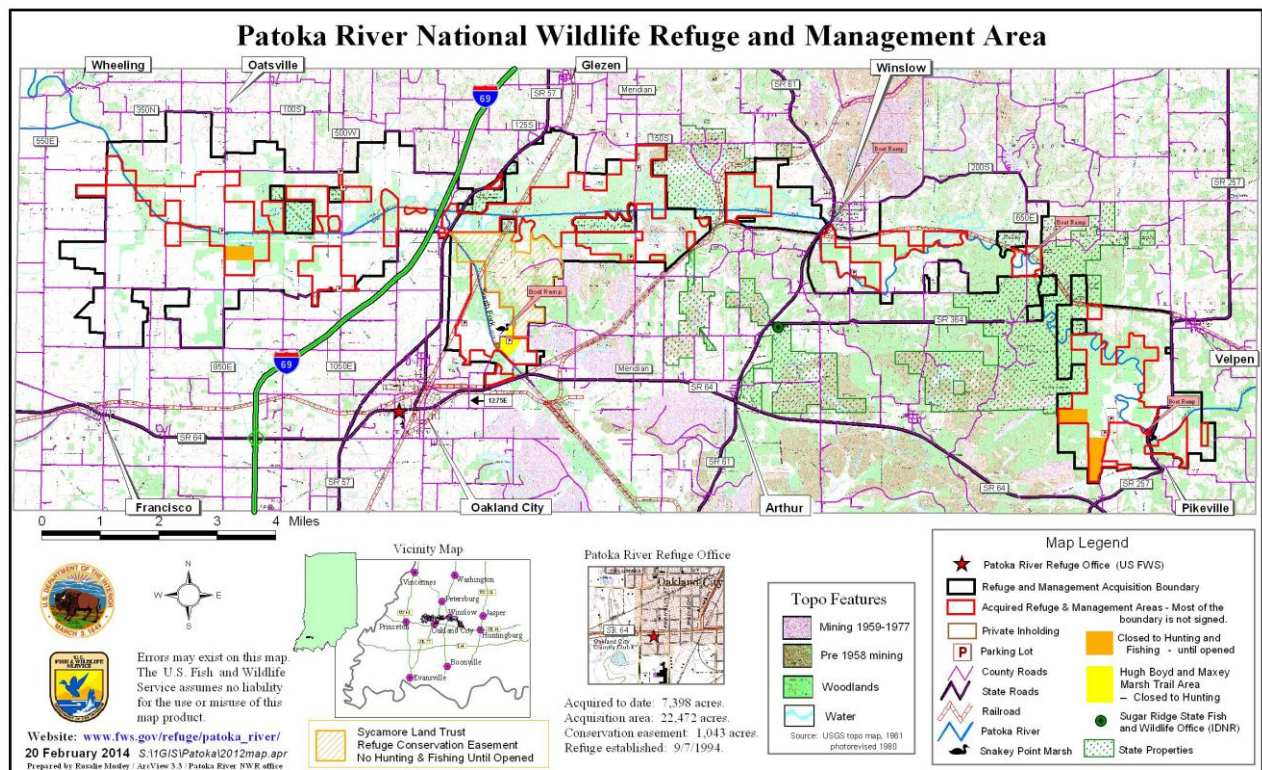


Figure 1. Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge and Management Area, Southwestern Indiana

II. CONFORMANCE WITH STATUTORY AUTHORITIES

The authority for the establishment of the Refuge is the Emergency Wetlands Resource Act of 1986 (Public Law 99-645). The purpose of land acquisition is for intensifying cooperative efforts among private interests and local, state, and federal governments for the management and conservation of wetlands.

This Hunt Plan has been developed to guide hunting on the Refuge in a manner that allows the Service to fulfill the purposes for which the Refuge was established as well as provide wildlife-dependent recreation.

Hunting was identified in the 2008 CCP as being a priority public use that would be authorized on most units of the Refuge. The Service has determined (i.e., Compatibility Determination included with the 2008 CCP) that this use is compatible with the purpose of the Refuge and the mission statement of the NWR System.

Guidance for authorizing public uses on National Wildlife Refuges is provided in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Improvement Act) of 1997 (USFWS 1997).

The Improvement Act states, “compatible wildlife-dependent recreation is a legitimate and appropriate general public use of the System...through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife.” The Improvement Act recognizes that wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible, are a legitimate and appropriate use of the Refuge system lands. The Improvement Act states that these specific six uses should receive priority consideration in refuge planning and management. Other uses not listed as priority public uses may be allowed if they are determined to be appropriate and compatible with the purposes for which the Refuge was established.

According to the Improvement Act, when a wildlife-dependent recreational use is determined to be a compatible use and is not inconsistent with public safety, that activity should be facilitated. The term “compatible use” is defined as a wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a refuge unit that, in the sound professional judgment of the Director, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the System or the purposes of the Refuge. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Final Compatibility Policy (USFWS 2000) pursuant to the Improvement Act delegates the responsibility of determining compatibility to the Refuge Manager with concurrence by the Regional Office Supervisor.

Hunting on the Refuge will allow refuge staff to manage wildlife populations at acceptable levels, provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for the public, and promote a better understanding and appreciation of natural habitats and their associated fish and wildlife resources. Implementation of the proposed actions will be consistent with the Refuge Recreation Act, the Refuge Administration Act, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the establishment of the Patoka River National Wetlands Project and compatible with Refuge purposes.

Relationship to other Plans and Documents

The first Hunting and Fishing Plan for the Refuge was approved in 1996. This plan, along with accompanying paperwork used to fulfill the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements, opened the Refuge to hunting. It considered the biological, environmental, and socioeconomic effects that implementing the preferred alternative and two other alternatives would have on the issues and concerns identified during the planning process. The preferred alternative included opening the Refuge lands to new hunting opportunities.

In 2008 a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge & Management Area was approved. The EA and CCP addressed future management of the Refuge, including visitor services. This Hunt Plan is a step down plan of the CCP, and as such, contains more detailed information describing the hunt program on the Refuge. This plan will also be included as a chapter of the Visitor Services Plan upon its completion.

Big game, small game, furbearers, game bird, and migratory bird hunting are presented in this Hunt Plan. A list and a detailed description of the hunting opportunities proposed for the Refuge

are provided in this document.

Upon completion and adoption of this Hunt Plan, the Service will publish in the Federal Register a Proposed Rule that updates the hunting program on the Refuge. Following the comment period on the Proposed Rule, a determination will be made whether to implement the updated hunting opportunities outlined in this Hunt Plan.

Subsequently, a Final Rule will be published outlining hunting on the Refuge.

III. STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

Hunting objectives:

The following hunting objectives for the Patoka River Refuge were contained in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, approved by Regional Director Sam Marler in the Record of Decision dated September 7, 1994:

- To open Project lands to recreational hunting as soon as sufficient land has been acquired and biological data collected to properly manage wildlife populations.
- To open all suitable Project lands to waterfowl hunting, other than those lands needed to provide essential sanctuary.
- To open Project lands to all forms of traditional resident game hunting after coordination with the Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife.
- To assure, either spatially or chronologically, that hunting and other priority public uses of the Refuge do not conflict or encroach upon each other.

The hunting program is in direct support of the Refuge objective to increase public opportunities for outdoor recreation. All proposed hunting will be in accordance with state seasons and regulations.

IV. ASSESSMENT

The Service has allowed public hunting and has administered a hunting program on the Refuge since the first Hunting and Fishing Plan was developed in 1996. In the 2014 Refuge Annual Performance Plan (RAPP) it was estimated that 9,900 of the 24,500 total visits to the Refuge per year were for hunting (40%). During the time period since the inception of the first Hunting and Fishing Plan, the Service has not noted any significant adverse effects of this program on the administration on the Refuge and has determined that hunting is compatible with the purposes of the NWR System's mission statement.

White-tailed deer, waterfowl, waterbirds, aquatic mammals, passerine, and mammalian predators are monitored on the Refuge and surrounding areas by the Service and conservation partners. Fish, amphibians, reptiles, and insects also are monitored, although less frequently.

Recent assessments of species hunted in the vicinity of the Refuge indicate that those species are not facing a general decline. For waterfowl, the annual assessments are based upon the distribution, abundance, and flight corridors of migratory birds. The annual Waterfowl Population Status Report (USFWS 2014) includes the most current breeding population and production information available for waterfowl in North America and is a result of cooperative efforts by the Service, the Canadian Wildlife Service, various state and provincial conservation agencies, and private conservation organizations. According to the 2014 report, the total duck population was 49 million birds, a 8% increase over 2013 and 43% above the long-term average (1955-2013). The Indiana Department of Natural Resources (INDNR) does not release statewide estimates on waterfowl populations.

In the 2013 Indiana Deer Harvest Summary, the Indiana DNR reported deer harvest numbers from 1951 to 2013. The number of deer harvested in the state was below 20,000 until the early 1980's. Since then, the number of deer harvested has risen tremendously to a level where over 100,000 deer have been taken each year since 1992. Since 2004, hunters have harvested at least 120,000 deer each year. The report indicates that the 125,635 deer harvested in 2013 was 8% lower than the 136,248 deer harvested in 2012.

Within Pike (1,419 deer harvested) and Gibson (1,475 deer harvested) counties, where the Refuge is located, harvest numbers were similar to other Indiana counties in 2013.

The wild turkey now exists across the state after active reintroductions throughout the state from 1956 to 2004. According to INDNR, the density of turkeys over most of their range in Indiana is one to six birds per square mile with some estimates as high as 25 birds per square mile where habitat is suitable.

According to the 2013-2014 Spring and Fall Wild Turkey Harvest Results from the INDNR Division of Fish and Wildlife 11,989 wild turkeys were harvested in Indiana by hunters in 2013-2014. Two-hundred and thirty-eight wild turkeys (2.0% of the total harvest for IN) were harvested in Pike County, while Gibson County accounted for 161 harvested birds (1.3% of the total harvest for IN).

Data for all small (upland) game and furbearers (coyote, fox, raccoon, and opossum), which are pursued to a much smaller degree in comparison to waterfowl, deer, and turkey is collected by INDNR during their biennial survey of Indiana small game hunters, included in the Small Game Harvest Survey (the most recent being the 2010-2011 Small Game and Furbearer Hunter and Harvest Survey). Annual population indices, 10-year averages, and historical information are used to determine hunting guidelines for the species.

Game populations are such that hunting on Refuge lands would be consistent with the

harvestable surplus of these species while not affecting priority Refuge objectives. There is no apparent competition for habitat between game species and trust species nor are there unacceptable levels of predation by game species and other wildlife forms. Federal and state regulations permit hunting of species to maximize utilization of harvestable surplus of resident game and migratory birds and to tailor harvest opportunities to local management desires.

V. DESCRIPTION OF THE HUNTING PROGRAM

Most of the Refuge supports huntable populations of game species. Most of the Refuge is open to the public for some type of recreational use (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, interpretation, photography, and or environmental education).

Current Opportunities

Areas open to hunting currently includes 7,058 acres within the Refuge (Figure 1) and 219 acres in the White River Wildlife Management Unit (fee title transfer from U.S.D.A.) located near Petersburg. The Refuge land ownership pattern will be constantly changing as new land is acquired. These lands will be considered for inclusion in the hunting program, and the Refuge staff will file an annual amendment to the Hunt Plan for publication in the Federal Register to update and identify new areas available for these activities. This annual amendment process will continue until the Refuge is fully acquired.

Hunting periods will correspond with state regulations. As additional lands are acquired and Refuge management programs are instituted, it may become necessary to impose some regulations that are more restrictive than state laws (ie: closed areas for waterfowl sanctuary purposes, reduced shooting hours). These modifications will be included during the annual amendment process through the Federal Register, and the public will be informed through media and posting. Hunting success (harvest) will be determined initially on the basis of random, periodic hunter interview conducted by the Refuge staff. With Indiana's required deer and turkey check program, it will be possible to obtain a good assessment of the Refuge's deer and turkey harvest.

A Refuge permit is required to hunt furbearers.

Consultation will be made with Indiana DNR District Fishery and Wildlife Biologists and Fish and Wildlife Area Property Managers at least twice a year to discuss the merit and success of the Refuge's hunting program, the status of the area's game resources, and to consider recommendations for program modifications via the annual amendments.

Law enforcement activities will be conducted jointly by FWS law enforcement personnel and the local Conservation Officers of the Indiana DNR.

Hunting

Only those species authorized for hunting in Indiana and listed below may be hunted on the Refuge. All other species are protected.

Migratory Birds

Ducks
Geese
American Coot
Sora
Wilson's Snipe
American Woodcock
Mourning Dove

Game Birds

Quail (Northern Bobwhite)
Wild Turkey

Small Game

Rabbit (cottontail)
Gray and fox squirrel

Furbearers (Hunting only, Refuge Permit Required)

Red and gray fox
Coyote
Raccoon
Opossum

Big Game

White-tailed Deer

Boats

On refuge property, motorboats are only permitted on Snakey Point Marsh east of the South Fork and on Patoka River.

Motorboats on Snakey Point Marsh are restricted to slow speed/no wake.

To minimize disturbance to wildlife, gasoline powered motorboats are not permitted on other refuge waters.

Air boats are prohibited on all refuge waters.

Boats may not be left on refuge property overnight.

Safety

Discharge of firearms within 150 yards of any dwelling or building on or adjacent to the Refuge is prohibited. Hunters are cautioned to identify their targets before shooting. In addition to other hunters, non-hunting visitors are present on the Refuge throughout the year and may be in the field at any time.

General Refuge Regulations

Ammunition

Shotgun hunters using scattershot may possess and use only approved non-toxic shot. Use or possession of lead shot is prohibited while hunting all the above species on the Refuge. Hunters are expected to pick up and take out spent casings.

Motorized Vehicles

All motor vehicles must remain on maintained roads and parked so as not to interfere with other traffic. Off-road vehicles are not permitted on refuge lands.

Weapons

Firearms, archery equipment and crossbows meeting state requirements are permitted on the refuge only during the designated hunting season. Possession in vehicles while driving through the Refuge on public roads according to state regulations. Handguns are permitted according to state regulations.

Dogs

Dogs are allowed for hunting according to state regulations during designated seasons only. Otherwise, dogs must be leashed. Dog training or running in the off-season is prohibited.

Hunters with Disabilities

Hunters with disabilities must possess the required state permit. State regulations and access conditions apply.

Duck/Goose Blinds and Decoys

Pits or permanent blinds may not be constructed or used on the refuge area. Only portable blinds or structures constructed of native plant materials are permitted for waterfowl hunting. Blinds

must be removed or dismantled at the end of each day's hunt. Decoys must be removed at the end of each day's hunt.

Deer/Turkey Stands

Permanent tree stands/blinds may not be constructed or used on the refuge area. Portable tree stands may be used for deer or turkey hunting following the same guidelines established for state-owned lands and may be left overnight only between September 1, 2014 and January 10, 2015. Tree stands must be marked with owner's name, address and phone number.

The following activities are prohibited on Patoka River NWR&MA:

Littering/dumping including spent shotshell casings

Use or possession of alcoholic beverages while hunting.

Target practice or random shooting

Camping/overnight parking

Trapping furbearers

Open campfires/swimming

Taking or attempting to take any wildlife not authorized in these refuge regulations.

Taking, cutting or destroying any plants or parts thereof including flowers, fruits, nuts, fungi, herbs, shrubs or trees other than specified for temporary blind construction.

Use of off-road vehicles, horses, mules, llamas and bicycles other than on maintained road rights-of-ways.

Marking trails with tape, ribbons, paper, paint, tree blazes, etc.

Baiting or hunting over bait including salt.

Blocking gates or roadways with vehicles.

Searching for or removing any object of antiquity including arrowheads, pottery, beads, etc. Use of metal detectors or digging for artifacts.

Spotlighting prohibited by state regulations.

Use of fireworks.

Unless specifically listed as a permitted use, all uses of natural resources on the refuge are prohibited.

New Hunting Opportunities, Closings, and Regulations for 2014 and Beyond

In this Hunt Plan, the Service is proposing public hunting opportunities on newly acquired lands, while allowing all current hunting opportunities to continue for 2014 and beyond. As mentioned, newly opened lands will be subject to the same restrictions outlined above.

Under the proposed plan for 2014, the Service would open 1,334 acres of recently acquired land (fee title and conservation easement) to hunting.

1. Proposed Opening to Hunting

I. Columbia Mine Tract (Conservation Easement)

The Columbia Mine Unit of Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge and Management Area (Refuge) consists of 1,043 acres in Pike and Gibson Counties, acquired for protection in 2012. It is private property, owned by Sycamore Land Trust, Inc. , and managed as part of the larger Refuge complex by the Refuge. Because the Columbia Mine Unit is private property, it is subject to different public access and use regulations than other parts of the Refuge.

The management objective for this property is to provide appropriate public access, while protecting the property's conservation values in a way that is consistent with the objectives for the Refuge and Sycamore Land Trust. The entire property, minus a closed buffer area around the Bald Eagle nest, will be open to limited hunting of deer, wild turkey, and to a lesser extent, waterfowl. Hunting will take place according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and the following specific regulations for all specified species.

Waterfowl

Waterfowl hunting is permitted on Snakey Point Marsh currently, the eastern part of which is now owned by Sycamore Land Trust. Waterfowl hunting on all of Snakey Point Marsh will continue to be permitted, but only from boats. No waterfowl hunting is permitted from the Snakey Point shoreline of the Columbia Mine Unit, or on any other portion of the Columbia Mine Unit.

All other migratory birds are protected, including sora and other rails, Wilson's snipe, American woodcock, and mourning dove.

Wild Turkey

Wild turkey may be hunted during the entirety of the defined spring season. Only nontoxic ammunition is permitted; no lead shot is permitted. No fall season wild turkey hunting is permitted.

No quail or other game bird hunting is permitted on the property.

White-tailed deer

White-tailed deer may be hunted during the following periods only:

First week (7 days) of archery season.

First week of firearms season.

First week of muzzleloader season.

Small Game

No small game hunting is permitted on the property. All small game species are protected, including cottontail rabbit and gray and fox squirrel.

Furbearers

No hunting or trapping of furbearers is permitted on the property. All furbearer species are protected, including red and gray fox, coyote, raccoon, and opossum.

II. Bruce Tract

This 80 acre tract in Gibson County, IN was acquired in 2013. The entire unit would be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

III. Spitler Tract

This 207 acre tract in Pike County, IN was acquired in 2013. The entire unit would be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

IV. McCandless Tract

This 2.3 acre tract in Gibson County, IN was acquired in 2014. The entire unit would be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

V. Sycamore Land Trust (Singer) Tract

This 1.7 acre tract in Pike County, IN was acquired in 2014. The entire unit would be open to

hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

Consultation and Coordination with the State

National Wildlife Refuges, including Patoka River NWR & MA, conduct hunting programs within the framework of state and federal regulations. All authorized hunts are at least as restrictive as the state of Indiana. By maintaining hunting regulations that are as, or more, restrictive than the state, individual refuges ensure that they are maintaining seasons which are supportive of management on a local and regional basis. The EA associated with this Hunt Plan and the Preferred Alternative discussed in that document, has been reviewed and is supported by the INDNR. The Refuge has moved forward with developing this Hunting Chapter based upon earlier formal coordination with the INDNR as well as the intervening informal discussions. The results of this coordination are reflected in this Hunt Plan. Patoka River NWR & MA will continue to consult and coordinate with the INDNR annually to maintain regulations and programs that are consistent with the state; as well as to monitor populations of game species and set harvest goals.

Methods of Control and Enforcement

The enforcement of Refuge and state hunting regulations, trespass and other public use violations normally associated with management of a National Wildlife Refuge is the responsibility of commissioned Refuge Law Enforcement Officers. The Law Enforcement Officer on the Refuge cooperates with, and is assisted, by state, county and city police officers as well as state conservation officers. The procedures used for obtaining law enforcement assistance are based on the legal jurisdiction where incidents occur. The Refuge regularly meets with the various state, city and county law enforcement agencies to develop agreements and strategies to ensure law enforcement operations are performed as safely and efficiently as possible.

Funding and Staffing Requirements

No current staff time is allocated for coordinating hunting activities other than informing visitors of hunting regulations, updating Refuge maps depicting huntable areas and newly acquired lands, and updating Refuge regulations and plans.

VI. MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID CONFLICTS WITH OTHER MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Biological Conflicts

The Refuge avoids conflict related to biological resources by adopting the “wildlife first” principle explicitly stated in the Refuge Improvement Act. Staff monitors species population trends to ensure that target species can be hunted on the Refuge without adversely affecting the species. These monitoring activities include direct observation of populations, consultation with

state and Service species specialists, and review of current species survey information and research. Although not proposed in this current plan, the Refuge, in the future, could limit or exclude hunting activities on portions of Refuge units to avoid conflicts related to biological resources. Special hunts could also be used to manage hunting pressure and overall take at appropriate levels.

The federally endangered Indiana bat, Interior least tern, whooping crane, and protected bald eagle have been documented on the Refuge. The proposed opening of the Refuge to hunting will not conflict with the recovery and/or protection of these species. Attached and included in this proposal is a Section 7 analysis and an Environmental Assessment specifically for the hunting program.

Public Use Conflict

In an effort to avoid conflicts with non-hunting priority recreational uses as outlined in the Improvement Act, and for safety, the Refuge enforces a series of Refuge-specific hunting regulations. The boundary of most lands owned by the Service are posted with Refuge boundary signs. Areas administratively closed to hunting will be clearly marked with “No Hunting Zone” or “Area Beyond This Sign Closed” signs.

Public use conflicts will be minimized through close coordination with other public agency programs conducted on lands near the Refuge's hunting zones. The most significant of these involves the Indiana DNR, Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Administrative Conflicts

Refuge management activities can be accomplished without conflict with hunting activities through the use of administratively closed areas, timing of hunts, and methods of hunt.

VII. CONDUCT OF THE HUNTING AND FISHING PROGRAM

Hunting Regulations

Regulations Pertaining to all National Wildlife Refuge System Lands

Regulations pertaining to hunting on all National Wildlife Refuges are found in 50 CFR 32.2. They state:

§ 32.2 What are the requirements for hunting on areas of the National Wildlife Refuge System?

The following provisions shall apply to each person hunting on areas of the National Wildlife Refuge System:

- (a) Each person shall secure and possess the required state license.

(b) Each person 16 years of age and older shall secure and possess a Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp while hunting migratory waterfowl.

(c) Each person shall comply with the applicable provisions of Federal law and regulations including this subchapter and the current Federal Migratory Bird Regulations.

(d) Each person shall comply with the applicable provisions of the laws and regulations of the state wherein any area is located unless further restricted by Federal law or regulation.

(e) Each person shall comply with the terms and conditions authorizing access or use of wildlife refuges, including the terms and conditions under which hunting permits are issued.

(f) Each person must comply with the provisions of any refuge-specific regulations governing hunting on the wildlife refuge area. Regulations, special conditions, and maps of the hunting areas for a particular wildlife refuge are available at that area's headquarters. In addition, refuge-specific hunting regulations for migratory game bird, upland game, and big game hunting appear in §§32.20 through 32.72.

(g) The use of any drug on any arrow for bow hunting on national wildlife refuges is prohibited. Archers may not have arrows employing such drugs in their possession on any national wildlife refuge.

(h) The unauthorized distribution of bait and the hunting over bait is prohibited on wildlife refuge areas. (Baiting is authorized in accordance with state regulations on national wildlife refuges in Alaska).

(i) The use of nails, wire, screws or bolts to attach a stand to a tree, or hunting from a tree into which a metal object has been driven to support a hunter is prohibited on wildlife refuge areas.

(j) The use or possession of alcoholic beverages while hunting is prohibited.

(k) You may possess only approved nontoxic shot while in the field, which we identify in 50 CFR 20.21(j), while on Waterfowl Production Areas, or on certain other areas of the National Wildlife Refuge System as delineated on maps, leaflets and/or signs, available at each refuge headquarters or posted at each refuge, or as stated in refuge-specific regulations. Where we allow turkey and deer hunting, you may use slugs and shot containing lead to hunt these species unless prohibited by refuge-specific regulations and/or state law.

(l) The refuge-specific regulations (§32.20 through §32.72) may include the items discussed in §32.2(b). Refuge permits and brochures should also include those items and any special conditions allowed by paragraph (f) of this section.

The regulations, as they are published in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), are the

official notification to the public. Copies of the CFR can be found in libraries and on the internet.

A general synopsis of regulations relating to hunting on the Refuge units, as well as all other National Wildlife Refuges in Indiana, is published the Indiana Hunting and Trapping Regulations Handbook produced by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

Annual updates to Refuge regulations are provided to the INDNR for review and publication. State hunting regulations applicable to the Refuge, such as seasons, bag limits, and general methods of take also are published in the Handbook and Guide.

Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunt Plan

User conflicts between hunting and non-hunting visitors are likely to be minimal as these units are similar to state Wildlife Management Areas, state forests, and other public lands scattered across Southwest Indiana.

Most of the non-hunting visitations occur from April through October for bird and wildlife observation. Environmental education and interpretation also occur on these units, but to a lesser degree than wildlife observation. The majority of the environmental education and interpretation activities occur in the spring, summer and early fall. Due to this seasonality, conflicts with hunting are expected to be minimal.

Hunting Application and Registration

For general hunting activities, besides hunting furbearers, no special application or registration process is required.

Individuals hunting furbearers must obtain a special permit from the Refuge prior to hunting.

Hunter Selection

For general hunting activities, there is no special hunter selection process. Hunters who are eligible to hunt under Indiana law are allowed to hunt on the Refuge units.

Announcing and Publicizing Openings, Closings, and Modifications

As with previously developed changes to the Refuge hunting programs, this plan will be available for public review for a period of 30 days.

Hunting Orientation and Safety

The Refuge requires no specific orientation or safety training for hunters participating in general hunting activities. The state of Indiana has established hunter education and safety training requirements that are in effect for hunters.

Hunter orientation to Refuge lands and areas open to hunting are provided directly on the Refuge through the use of signs, brochures, and maps.

Entry and Access Procedures

There are no special entry or access procedures for hunters using the Refuge. For specific access questions please contact the Refuge Manager at:

Patoka River NWR & MA
Oakland City, IN 47660
812-749-3199

Hunter Requirements

Hunters who are eligible to hunt under Indiana law are allowed to hunt on Refuge units.

The Refuge does not routinely require hunters to report on hunting activities or harvest separately from requiring a permit to hunt furbearers. Should an additional reporting program be implemented, the Refuge will use the appropriate form approved by the Office of Management and Budget.

VIII. REFERENCES

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